

PDX Garden Stories

Interviews with participants in Growing Gardens Youth Grow Program Portland, Oregon

Interview with Katharine

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I: Ok, so, why don't you just start by introducing yourself and tell us what you do.

K: I'm Katharine Grunseth, I'm an ESL teacher, English as a Second Language teacher at Kelly Elementary.

I: So what made you decide to get involved with Youth Grow?

K: My background is actually in forestry and that's what I went to school for and then my family had a cherry orchard so any chance I can get to get kids involved in, you know, science outside or seeing the benefits of, you know, growing their own food I am all for.

I: Why don't you tell us about what students learn and do in Youth Grow?

K: Well for instance we did a whole pollination unit, so the students, you know, try and get them to not freak out when they go in the garden and see a bee, now they know that the bee is actually working. So we went out and we, looked for different flowers and we looked for whether or not bees were travelling to those flowers, but my hope is in the future we'll get a whole pollinator friendly garden going and then when we go out there we'll see like all sorts of animals in action, but...

I: About how often to students actually get out in the garden?

K: For every class we get out at least once a week into the garden, and that's just for my class.

I: Are the students involved, is it just a learning garden or do they actually plant?

K: Take care of it?

I: -and take care of it?

K: Yes, actually that is primarily what they do, anytime I'm planting something I'm make sure that one of the grade levels is planting it and then - We try to go through what living things need, so we try to interact them with water, rain, or you know, noticing when it rains we don't need to water. And then I have some fourth grade girls who aren't even my students, but who love to water. They come for the after school class, the garden class that Lisa does, so then they want to water and I'll bring them out there and we'll water.

Z: Do you just have that one after school type class with her?

K: There's the SUN School that she does, so garden club, and I think every semester it's with a different group, so this semester it is with fourth and fifth graders, so it's geared more towards them.

Z: Is it every day?

K: Just Mondays, and I'm thinking about taking it over next year.

I: So how would you say students change from their involvement with gardening

K: I think well for me it's... there's very little behavior management in the garden you know besides them maybe getting a little excited you know, the ones that maybe a little of an issue in the classroom are less of an issue in the garden. It just kinda calms them down a little bit.

Z: Do they have more time to

K: Or the space

Z: Space

K: or just being in a different space and

Z: Yeah

K: OK I don't have - I don't know if it just resets their mind - I don't know what it is.

I: How about in terms of how they look at food? Does that change, do you notice a change in that?

K: I think so, I mean we sing this whole song in first grade, "Dirt Made My Lunch" and when we first sang it, they were like 'what this is crazy, what are you talking about' and then we talked about the different things they ate for lunch and then we would rewind it back to the ground and - OK do you see where your bread - how the flour came from the ground. So in that sense I think they can connect the dots and figure it out.

I: So how has your outlook on gardening and agriculture changed, or has it...?

K: No I think part of me came back with a pretty solid background in it already. My hope was to educate children about it and teachers too, so they make that connection in taking care of their involvement and being stewards of the land and thinking about where their food comes from, and it does not come from Cheetos.

I: Have you seen that change in other teachers though?

K: Maybe - yeah - maybe a little bit, I think there is definitely room for growth. And we're supposed to get a half time coordinator next year and I am hoping that will be the missing piece, that she'll be able to really help those teachers who want to go out but are too afraid to go, or don't know what they are going to do or don't have time to plan a lesson. It's going to be all done for them, so then it'll just be having to go get the children there and I think that will make a difference.

I: So is there an experience that or a particular event that you can talk about that you think has an impact on students?

K: I would have to think about it, you may want to pause it.

K: Let me think I'm sure there is something.

I: A little more generally then. Do the families get involved?.

K: Some families do, unfortunately that is kind of an all across the board issue at our school because families are busy at this school. But we do have a couple of families who come to the work parties, who are talking about taking it over for the summer, which would be nice to see, it would be even better if more than just a couple of families would take it over. I think it's just really getting that one family and then the rest will come, That is my hope.

I: All right so that is sort of the list of questions, so we can come back to a specific moment you talked about the, sort of behavioral management aspect of it. Is there anything else, sort of the ways that students kind of change or things they learn from the garden.

K: They're just more excited to learn when they are in that outdoor space, even when we are out there in the winter and it's kind of cold most of them are really excited to be out there. I mean you get the ones that are complaining about the sun or the heat but the most part they are always asking, when we are going out, and there is discoveries every time.

K: We've had some struggles this year with just growing some simple stuff, and finally, like the seeds finally popped our third time around and they were like "oh my gosh Mrs. G it's so..." Any time that things actually grow it's you know, exciting.

I: That would be great I am going to record that now

K: Any time that the things actually grow from a seed that a child has planted there is great excitement with the teacher and with the student we have had some struggles with growing just simple things and so the third time around when things actually grew the children were actually excited to see it.